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ABSTRACT

Although many English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teachers know that reading and writing have an effect on each other, research on reading and writing have developed independently and have not greatly influenced each other or reading/writing pedagogy. Teachers must determine the best way to encourage more effective learning in which the reciprocal effects of reading and writing on each other are utilized. Five topics are addressed that should be considered for using readings in an ESL writing classroom: selection of readings (short texts and topic variety); expected accomplishments; how texts are used in the classroom and the purposes for which students read them; reading instruction strategies similar to strategies used in process oriented writing classes; and the social nature of reading and writing. It is suggested that the inclination to divide language into separate skills may be a mistake and that reading and writing classrooms should be reintegrated. By focusing less on teaching generic reading skills and more on helping students understand specific texts that they want to understand, teachers can help students experience ease and pleasure in reading and writing in English. Contains 28 references. (LB)

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Emerging Perspectives on Advanced ESL Reading Instruction

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Many ESL writing or reading teachers intuit that reading and writing have an effect on each other. We seem to believe that good writers read a great deal, or least did at one time in their lives. But in the last 10-20 years, research in reading and research in writing have progressed almost entirely independently and have emphasized the differences between the two processes. Very little exists in the research literature about the effect of L2 reading and writing on each other, and most of what there is in L2 has focused on the effect of pleasure reading on reading and writing ability (Janopoulos 1986; Atkinson and Hedgcock 1990). As a result, the findings of research on reading have had little effect on writing instruction and vice versa. Yet even though reading and writing research have not influenced each other or reading/writing pedagogy very much, the research findings from one echo the findings of the other.

Both reading and writing research have benefited a great deal from a psycholinguistic focus in which researchers have turned away from the product, the text, toward explorations of the cognitive processes of the reader or writer. Through protocol or think-aloud analyses of L2 writers we have some idea of what goes on in the minds of experienced and inexperienced L2 writers as they compose: how much they plan, how much they

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translate from their L1, where they focus their attention, how they handle vocabulary problems. Also through protocols and through miscue analyses we have an idea of where L2 readers focus their attention as they try to make sense of a text: to what extent they predict upcoming text, what they do with unknown vocabulary, how they try to process incoming text and relate it to what they have already read.

The findings of these kinds of studies have shown that inefficient readers depend too heavily on bottom-up strategies to decode or extract meaning from text. They spend time decoding the letters on the page and the words in the sentence, trying to make sense of the text one word at a time and taking so long to do it that by the time they get to the end of the sentence, they have lost their sense of what the beginning of the sentence said. Inexperienced writers have also been shown to some extent to focus excessively on word and sentence level concerns, to be reluctant to tamper with what they've managed to already get down on the page. The implications of this research have been to discourage teachers from teaching subskills of reading and writing, like grammar and vocabulary, to encourage us to focus on cognitive strategies in approaching reading and writing that imitate the cognitive strategies of proficient L2 readers and writers, and to encourage our students to focus on more global features of text. Good readers skim and scan, predict content, guess word meaning from context, so these strategies are what we teach. Student writers learn invention techniques, get used to multiple drafting, and leave editing till the end of the writing process.

Further research shows us not only that an overemphasis on word and sentence level subskills is ineffective but also that reading and writing strategies are not hierarchical but interactive in reading and recursive in writing. That is, proficient readers don't ONLY guess psycholinguistically; they also pay attention to the words on the page, the grammar, the cohesive devices. They organize text processing both from the top down using background knowledge and experience to interpret the text and organize incoming information and from the bottom up using the marks on the page as guide and corrective to understanding. And experienced writers don't plan, then draft, then revise, then edit. They may draft a little first, then plan some, then draft, revising as they generate text, then plan some more. Good readers and writers, then, appear to be flexible in their approach to texts, using different strategies and reusing them in different orders depending on what they need at the moment.

ESL reading and writing specialists are familiar with these ways of thinking about L2 reading and writing and many of our textbooks now reflect these attitudes. Another important notion informs our current view of reading and writing, the idea of the writer and the reader's construction of meaning. That a writer constructs meaning or knowledge is not difficult to imagine. We assume that the writer makes decisions about what to include and what to leave out of a piece of writing in order either to express what is already in his or her mind to write or else to discover meaning through the act of writing itself, to have knowledge become clear or consolidated by seeing it written on a

page. This is in a sense the meaning of "composing" and helps explain why "guided composition" is such a misnomer and not much in favor these days; writing is creative.

It may not be quite as obvious that reading is also creative. Yet many researchers and thinkers regard reading as the construction of meaning as well--not the REconstruction, but the construction. Meaning is thought of not as residing in the text for the reader to dig out, because no meaning exists outside of a reader to read the text and each reader's reading of a text is different. In fact different readings are created not only by different readers but also over time, so that the Shakespeare we read today is not and cannot be the same work that people read in Shakespeare's time. We count on those very shifts in meaning over time when we advise students to leave a draft aside for a few days before rereading it for revision. The meaning of the text is created by the interaction of the text with the reader in a given context and at the moment of reading as the reader uses the marks on the page and the schemata available in the brain to construct textual meaning. (See Kucer 1985 on how schema become available depending on rhetorical context.)

Here, however, we experience an odd gap in our information from research. We do not quite know how readers and writers construct meaning. As a result, we can teach our students strategies for generating and processing texts which good readers and writers use to help them construct meaning but the essence of reading and writing eludes us. We appear to be in the odd situation of attempting to teach what cannot be taught. We teach peripheral skills, strategies, and information about reading and

writing but not how to make meaning with and from text. Luckily for us and for our students, while we do not know how to teach students to construct meaning, good readers and writers have learned how to do it. That is, although the meaning-making part of reading and writing can't be taught, it certainly can be learned.

As teachers then we must determine the best way to encourage that learning, and it is here, I want to argue, that we need to make changes in our practices. First of all, we know that reading and writing have a reciprocal effect on each other. Reading builds knowledge of various kinds to write on or to use in writing; writing consolidates knowledge in a way that builds schemata to read with. We know, for example, that biology professors learn to write articles like biology professors from reading articles that biology professors have written. We do not have courses that teach biology professors to write like biology professors. We also know from our own experience that we often need to write in response to reading in order to learn what it is that we have understood of the reading. Reading and writing interact with each, possibly making use of the same cognitive structures to create a text world (Kucer 1985).

Despite the relationship between reading and writing and the interaction between them in the construction of knowledge, we often teach ESL courses in reading separate from ESL courses in writing. This is our first mistake. In fact, in universities we often teach L2 writing but not courses in reading. The reason for this is fairly clear. If L2 students do not read well, they

can get the information they need from other sources, possibly from lectures, also from classmates, from books in their L1, from easier treatments of the same subject in other books, or just from grinding the textbook for hours trying to make sense of it. This effort and potential failures are hidden from us and from our content area colleagues. What we do see however, and what we hear about, is our students' writing. So we have courses to teach writing but not reading.

We can, of course, use readings in writing classes. One reason we often do not comes as a result of the process orientation to teaching writing as opposed to what preceded it in many of our classrooms, the current-traditional approach, with its use of readings of model texts for writing. The current-traditional approach usually advocated analysis of the structure of a reading and then instructions to students to more or less imitate that structure in their writing. When ESL writing instruction turned away from the use of model texts and began to think of form as being generated from content rather than form as a mold into which content is poured, some of us threw out the baby with the bath water and eliminated reading in writing classes.

This is, however, only the first problem. Even those of us who use readings in writing classes, I want to argue, may still not have found the best ways to use them, ways in line with current and emerging views on reading and writing. I would like to discuss five topics related to teaching reading in writing classes that I think we need to consider. I am forced to distort this discussion somewhat since I am pulling these factors apart here in order to talk about them separately, but the topics are,

in fact, closely interrelated.

If we want to use readings in a writing classroom, we need to select the readings somehow. What most of us do when we teach reading and what most textbooks do is to select short texts on topics that are thought to be of high interest to our students: pollution, friendship, language, cultural differences, education, the role of women in various cultures. After working over the reading, we may ask our students to write summaries of the articles, reactions to it, or answers to questions about it. I see three problems here. Short texts are usually selected because they take less time to read and they fit into our class periods better than long texts. But the fact that the texts are short means that students never read enough about the subject to build the knowledge about it that would allow them to read with ease and pleasure. Second, a variety of subject matters is covered in order to maintain student interest. But the result of constant shifts in subject matter is once again the same; the texts are not easier to read; they are harder to read because the students have to gear up for a new subject with each reading selection. Third, the question of high interest. I submit that the subjects typically covered in ESL readers are of high interest to teachers and textbook writers, not particularly to L2 students. They MIGHT be of high interest if these students could already read them with the ease with which WE read them. But if reading is a struggle, which presumably we are saying it is since we are teaching it, then these subjects are unlikely to be of high enough personal interest to our students to overcome the disad-

vantage created by asking students to read on hodgepodge of subjects for no particular reason except to learn to read or write English better. This approach to teaching reading reminds me of the days when we taught writing by assigning an "interesting, motivating topic" for our students to write on, like "My most embarrassing moment" or "Differences between the U.S. and my country."

The second point we need to consider is what we hope to accomplish in giving ESL students that hodgepodge of high interest texts to read. We cannot really expect our students to be reading for pleasure given the texts we assign and the difficulty of L2 reading. We do not expect them to learn the facts covered in the reading; after all, a reading or writing course is a "skills" course. And the questions we typically ask after a reading have to do with checking to make sure the students read correctly not to make sure they know the information in the text. It seems the reason we ask our students to read these texts is that we want them to learn to read (because you learn to read by reading), to learn language, including vocabulary, possibly to learn something about writing, and probably to get them ready for reading they will have to do later in their educational careers. Compare these goals to our own real-world, natural goals for reading something: for pleasure or for information that is intrinsically interesting to us. It seems true that we learn to read by reading, but in the real world we do not read in order to PRACTICE reading. People do not say, "Did the newspaper come yet, dear? I want to practice a little reading." We do not learn to read in order to know how to read; we learn to read in

order to use reading as a tool to further other real-life purposes. Thus, it seems we should question the solipsistic goals of our reading classes, whose reason for being appears, in this description at least, to be entirely self-reflective.

These unnatural purposes in teaching reading are revealed in what we do with the texts we read in our classes. This is my third point. In the 70's and early 80's, when we stopped thinking of reading as a strictly bottom-up decoding process, we started introducing our students to top-down strategies through pre-reading activities, predicting text content, sometimes anticipating text structure. We no longer break down texts very often, at least not primarily, to focus on grammar. Instead we have students learn to identify main ideas in a passage or paragraph and locate supporting evidence. We also teach skimming and scanning. And what has happened in reading classes again reminds me of what happened in some process oriented writing classes. Means to an end became ends in themselves. Although we tell our students that different texts are read for different purposes and that good readers adjust their reading strategies to match the purpose, with every text we bring to their attention, we begin with pre-reading activities and we end with comprehension questions. There is a leveling out that occurs first in the text selection process and then again in the treatment of texts such that every text is given the same amount of classroom time, textbook space, and mental attention. Since we are selecting the texts and since we have no particular basis for the selection except that the texts should help our students learn to read, it

is not surprising that although we claim that readers read for different purposes, in our class, our students are only reading for one purpose. And as a result, they are reading all texts in exactly the same way. We might be able to construct post-reading exercises that made some sense if we knew why our students were reading these texts but since there is no real reason, our post-reading questions ask over and over what the main idea is.

We might say in defense of this strategy that in their later educational careers our students will need to be able to identify main ideas in the textbooks they read. There are two problems with this answer. First, in many academic courses it is precisely the details of the text that the students must understand and remember and not the main ideas. And second, research by Cohen and his colleagues (1979) showed that their L2 students could pretty well get the gist of textbook passages, but were stumped by details, by abstractions, by heavy noun phrases and complex grammatical structures, by failing to heed transition words, and by semi-technical vocabulary words, like <u>function, characterize, depend on</u>. Yet we already know that trying to anticipate those problems and teach heavy noun phrases, complex grammatical structures, and transition words has not led to better reading. We have move away from teaching analytical decoding skills as reading.

So how do we teach reading or use readings in a writing class? This is my fourth point. Reading instruction needs to adopt some of the strategies used in process oriented writing classes. One of these is intervening in the reading process. In many writing classes now, students show their drafts to others,

including the teacher, as the drafts are developing in order to get guidance and feedback on the writing. Many ESL writing teachers appear fairly convinced of the value of that kind of intervention. But we have not done that in teaching reading, except in elementary schools, whose teachers have a great deal to show us about getting out of the way of progress in L2 literacy.

How can we intervene in our students' reading processes? A first step would be to let students see our own reading processes. Many writing teachers write with their students and share their drafts to demonstrate their writing processes. We might consider doing more reading out loud in our classes but doing so in a way that demonstrates our reading processes, thinking aloud as we read, as subjects are asked to do in protocol analyses. We need to show how we chunk groups of words together, how we use intonation to get us through heavy embedding, how we backtrack when we've lost the thread, how we ignore incongruities or puzzling words for as long as possible before interrupting the flow of our reading, and most importantly, how we work to tie the incoming text to patterns of information we already know.

Besides demonstrating reading processes we need to intervene in our students' processes more directly as well. Many ESL teachers use writing workshops in their classrooms and one-on-one student/teacher writing conferences in their offices. We might try this with reading. In a reading workshop in classrooms, students may read silently and individually or out loud in groups but can request teacher or peer intervention when they've lost the thread or whenever they need to. They can consult with

others in class who are reading the same thing to test their understandings against those of others as they are reading, not only afterward. In a reading conference, an individual student meets one-on-one with the teacher and reads out loud to the teacher, as in a protocol study again, voicing doubts, backtracking, displaying where the text is leaving him or her behind; the teacher is available to intervene and push the reading along.

A different kind of intervention in the reading relies on a dialogue between writing and the text the student is reading. In this case, students are encouraged to interrupt their reading with written comments, elaborating on the text by writing down their own experiences and opinions, contradicting the text, or reacting in some other way. Christopher Lasch, the social philosopher, maintains we do not learn from information; we only really learn from dialogue and debate as we are forced to clarify to ourselves and others what we believe and our reasons for believing it. Otherwise, knowledge remains formless and vague. Instead of asking our students to read a text and afterwards to summarize or react to it, as we often do now, asking them instead to engage in a written dialogue with the text as they are reading is likely to help them not only to understand their own position in relation to the text but possibly to actually understand the text itself better through the demands on attention created by the dialectical process of intervening in the text by creating more text.

Along these same lines of recognizing that we create meaning through reading, as teachers we need to refrain from imposing the text we create in our reading onto our students' emerging texts.

Just as it is important for writing teachers not to appropriate their students' writing by pushing students to write the text the teacher wants to read or would have written herself, reading teachers need to refrain from appropriating the meaning of the texts their students read. I am suggesting that the question should not be "What is the author saying here? What is the author's main idea?" but rather "What did you get out of this? What do you make of this part?" The students are losing nothing by not getting the main idea of some arbitrarily selected reading passage on dreams, but they are gaining a great deal if they are able to make some portion of that text their own, linguistically, rhetorically, or conceptually.

Another important way I think we can make this happen and integrate reading and writing better, and acknowledge more fully how reading and writing shape each other, is to reconsider our classroom habit of asking our students to address a series of unrelated reading and writing tasks over the course of a term. We might consider instead various ways of sequencing reading and writing assignments so that each assignment draws on the previous ones and calls for rereading and rewriting a new vision informed by new information on the same subject. This would allow our student to build the knowledge structures appropriate to confronting reading/writing tasks. There is good reason to call into question the idea that someone is a good writer or a good reader. It is probably more accurate to say someone is good at reading this text or at writing that one. Sequenced assignments are more likely than separate unrelated assignments to allow a

student to be come a good reader and a good writer of texts unified around a theme and building upon each other. (See Leki 1992, for one type of sequenced assignment.)

My final point has to do with the social nature of reading and writing and how we might reintegrate that social perspective into the reading/writing classroom. Reading is not only a cognitive process. It is intricately bound up in a social, historical, cultural network that we ignore if we operate as though reading can only be individual: read at home alone and then answer questions on the text. A first step in the direction of a more social role for reading is the kind of class reading I suggested earlier in which the teacher demonstrates her reading of a text or parts of a text. Another importation from the writing classroom is students reading out loud together to each other in groups, using the same kind of reflective reading approach that I am suggesting teachers try. The students work out the meaning of the text as a group, in the same way that all kinds of students get together to study for exams, reading and interpreting together.

In many writing classrooms these days, students also read each other's writing and respond to it to help the writer <u>improve</u> that draft. In a reading/writing classroom, I would suggest that this activity take on a new role. Students should read each other's text not only to effect <u>text repairs</u> of various kinds but to use their classmates' writing as sources for their own writing, considering and addressing their classmates' points of view, and <u>citing their classmates</u>, not only published work, in their bibliographies.

Our inclination to divide language up into separate skills in order to deal with each one one at a time may be a mistake. We need to reintegrate the reading and writing classrooms, and stop dividing language into atomized, learnable bits or skills. We need to accept that our students cannot understand everything they read and that they will not necessarily interpret a text the same way we do. But perhaps the most important change we need to make in our thinking about reading is to focus less on teaching generic reading sills and focus more on helping students understand specific texts which they have some reason for wanting to understand. It may be that only through becoming good readers and writers of specific text can our students begin to experience ease and pleasure in reading and writing in English.

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